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SUBJ: MINE AWARENESS DAY: LAO UXO NATIONAL REGULATORY
AUTHORITY OFFICIALLY OPENS

¶1. (U) Summary: On April 4 the GOL commemorated International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action by holding an official opening of the National Regulatory Agency (NRA). The event was hosted at NRA headquarters by Deputy Prime Minister and Chairman of the NRA Axang Laoly, and included remarks by UNDP Resrep Finn Reske Nielsen, UNICEF Country Representative Olivia Yambi, and NRA Director Maligna Saignavongs. Laoly thanked the various donors to the UXO sector over the years, including the United States. Post released a statement in support of International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action, congratulating the NRA, and noting USG assistance to the sector. The statement was printed in an English language daily newspaper, and USG support was noted in Lao language newspaper articles about the event. End Summary.

NRA Grand Opening

¶2. (U) The GOL hosted donors, UXO operators and NGOs for the NRA opening ceremony at NRA headquarters on April 4. Following remarks, UNDP Resrep and Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Welfare and Vice Chairman of the NRA Laoly Faiphengyoua signed a document officially establishing the NRA as the independent regulatory body with overall responsibility for UXO Clearance in Laos. The NRA will implement the long-term strategic plan for UXO clearance, provide policy direction, license clearance operators and give quality assurance for all clearance activities. The event served also to commemorate the first International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action.

Post Press Release

¶3. (U) In conjunction with the April 4 events, Post issued a press release to congratulate the NRA and to highlight the USG's assistance to the Lao UXO sector, which read:

The United States joins in observing April 4th as the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action, and the U.S. Embassy, Vientiane congratulates the National Regulatory Agency (NRA) on its official opening. "We look forward to working closely with the NRA," remarked U.S. Ambassador Patricia Haslach. "An effective, independent NRA is crucial to continuing the progress in reducing and removing the UXO problem in Laos." The U.S. has contributed well over \$25 million to UXO removal, public awareness and victims' assistance programs in Laos since 1998, including \$3.5 million in 2005. The U.S. Humanitarian Mine Action Program supports mine action worldwide through bilateral and multilateral assistance and through more than

50 public-private partnerships with non-governmental organizations and civic groups. As the world leader in helping to reduce the impact of persistent landmines and unexploded ordnance left from past conflicts, the United States is honored to participate in commemorative activities to help publicize this important issue.

¶4. (SBU) The press release was printed in its entirety in KPL News, a daily English language newspaper, and the USG's assistance to the sector was noted in Lao language newspaper articles about the NRA event. This is a welcome change from a recent lack of recognition of the USG's large role in funding UXO activities in Laos, including articles that mentioned, among donors to the sector, India's assistance in English language training for UXO personnel, but pointedly did not mention the USG, historically one of the largest donors. Post will continue to monitor press coverage to ensure that the recognition was not an isolated instance.

HASLACH